ARTICLE 11 - SIGNS

Section 11-1. Purpose and Applicability.

This Article constitutes the zoning regulations for all Signs, unless otherwise exempted in this Article or by Section 4-1 (Conformity of Buildings and Land) of this Code. Where conflicts exist between an illustration or other graphic and the text of any provision of this Article, the text shall govern.

The purpose of this Article is to regulate the size, location, and design of temporary and permanent Signs; to promote a contextual balance of architectural features and Signs; to provide clear regulations for businesses, building owners, and residents; and to preserve the legibility and safety of the urban environment across all the districts of the city.

Nothing contained in this Article shall conflict with M.G.L. Chapter 85, Section 8 & 9 or M.G.L. Chapter 93, Sections 29 through 33, as amended.

This Article shall not restrict speech on the basis of its content, viewpoint, or message in regards to signage.

Section 11-2. Definitions.

A capitalized word or phrase shall have the meaning set forth in Article 2 (Definitions), unless it has meaning ascribed in this Article.

Section 11-3. Signs and Non-Sign Items Exempt From a Sign Permit.

The following Signs and non-Sign items are allowed and exempt from the requirements of Section 11-4 (Permitting). Unless otherwise specified, Signs described in this Section 11-3 that exceed the maximums listed here to be exempt from a sign permit shall be considered allowed sign types and subject to the provisions of Section 11-7 (Allowed Signs).

1. **Bike Parking Signs.** Signs indicating the location of on-premise bicycle parking.
2. **Building Addresses.** Numerals and letters identifying a Building's street address, not to exceed eight (8) square feet in total Sign Area.
3. **Community Event Signs.** Signs associated with neighborhood meetings, garage sales, school events, or any similar community events. Such signs may be displayed until the conclusion of the event to which they relate.
4. **Construction Signs.** Signs identifying and displaying information related to a construction project, erected on the premises where such construction is or will be taking place. Such signs may be displayed until the completion of the construction to which they relate.

5. **Directional Signs.** Signs, without commercial advertising, that direct the travel of pedestrians, bikes, or vehicles, not to exceed six (6) square feet of Sign Area per Sign.

6. **Directory Signs.** Signs on a residential building or multi-tenant commercial building indicating names of tenants and dwelling unit numbers located on or near a doorway, not to exceed eight (8) square feet of total Sign Area per entrance.

7. **Gas Pumps and Electric Vehicle Chargers.** Signs placed or affixed to gas pumps or electric vehicle chargers.

8. **Historic Markers.** Plaques, markers, or historic building identification.

9. **Home Occupation Signs.** Signs associated with an Accessory Home Occupation, not to exceed eight (8) square feet of total Sign Area and without illumination.

10. **Hours of Operation.** Signs located in or on storefront doors and windows, containing an establishment's hours of operation.

11. **Menu Boards.** Fixed menu boards for a restaurant or drive-through restaurant.

12. **Murals.** Any non-commercial artwork, permanently or semi-permanently applied (by painting, mosaic, tile, or similar technique) to an exterior wall or other substantial surface of a building or structure, is not a Sign when it does not showcase an explicit commercial message that includes a business name or logo.

13. **Official Signs.** Signs, postings, or notices issued by a City, county, state, or federal agency in carrying out its function, including those relating to street maintenance, transit, and traffic control.

14. **Public Access Signs.** Signs that inform the public of their right to occupy or pass through publicly accessible spaces, such as for areas subject to Chapter 91 requirements.

15. **Temporary Signs.** Non-permanent Signs, excluding Community Event Signs, Construction Signs, and Portable Signs. Such signs, including those advertising a property for sale or available for lease, shall be:

    a. Displayed for a maximum of ninety (90) days or seven (7) days after the conclusion of the activity it was related to, whichever is less;

    b. Limited to one (1) Sign per Lot Frontage;

    c. Limited to 32 square feet of Sign Area per Sign;

    d. Placed at or below the second-story of a Building or in a Front Yard with setbacks that comply with the requirements of Table 11.G;

e. May not be internally illuminated; and

f. If a Temporary Sign exceeds these requirements then it shall be a conditional use, subject to the provisions of Article 6 (Conditional Uses) of this Code.

16. **Window Displays.** Displays of merchandise and products in a storefront window.

Section 11-4. Permitting.

A sign permit is required to erect, install, construct, move, alter, replace, suspend, or display any Sign, unless such Sign is exempt from a permit as listed in Section 11-3 (Signs and Non-Sign Items Exempt From a Sign Permit), or as otherwise specified in Section 11-10 (Maintenance and Nonconforming Signs).

Section 11-5. Forbidden Signs.

Any Sign that constitutes or incorporates the following items, even if such Sign is otherwise allowed by this Article, is forbidden and subject to the provisions of Article 7 (Variances) of this Code:

1. **Billboards and Outdoor or Off-Premise Advertising.** Billboards and other Signs advertising goods or services not provided on the premises, excluding the Signs described in Section 11-10.2 (Nonconforming Signs) and Section 11-11.1 (Removal).

2. **Signs Disrupting Ingress, Egress, or Traffic.** Signs that obstruct ingress, egress, or the accessible path of travel; block the view of or imitating traffic signs, signals, and devices; produce excessive glare; or otherwise create a hazard for pedestrian, bicycle, or vehicular traffic.

3. **Signs that Move or Emit Matter.** Signs that rotate, inflate, or intermittently move; or emit audible sounds, odors, or visible matter.

4. **Signs Attached to Natural Features.** Signs attached to trees, rocks, or other natural features.

5. **Portable Signs.** Free-Standing Signs not permanently attached to the ground, including, but not limited to A-frame signs and T-frame signs.

6. **Electronic Signs.** Signs that allow for periodic changes in copy, images and/or symbols by electronic means, excluding drive-thru menu boards and on-site gas station signs displaying changeable price information.

    a. **Exceptions.** Electronic Signs are forbidden; except that Electronic Signs for the following uses are conditional uses and subject to the provisions of Article 6 (Conditional Uses) and this Article:

i. Entertainment/Events Uses;

ii. Hospital Uses; and

iii. Certain High Impact Subuses of College or University Uses, including athletic facilities, theaters, and other similar facilities of public assembly.

b. **Requirements for Electronic Signs.** Electronic Signs are subject to the requirements set forth in the Section.

i. Electronic Signs require Comprehensive Sign Review, as described in Section 11-9 (Comprehensive Sign Review).

ii. An Electronic Sign is limited to an eight (8) year display period at which time, upon timely and proper appeal, the Board may renew the permit for an additional period of eight (8) years, provided the Sign was operated in compliance with the provisions of the conditional use in all material respects.

iii. Electronic Signs are limited to hours of operation between 7:00 AM and 2:00 AM.

iv. Electronic Signs may not have a nighttime luminance in excess of 500 cd/m2 or a figure established through Comprehensive Sign Review.

v. The illuminated side of an Electronic Sign shall be appropriately screened and an adequate distance from residences.

vi. Electronic Signs may not compromise public safety in any way, including through the use of rapidly changing or distracting images that create hazards for pedestrians, bicyclists, or vehicular traffic.

c. **Fees.** The owner of an Electronic Sign shall be required to obtain an annual license and pay an annual fee to the Authority based on size, location and content of the Electronic Sign. In addition, the owner of an Electronic Sign will be required to pay, on an annual basis to the Authority, a percentage of any commercial revenue derived from advertisements or announcements for off-premise events or products displayed on such Electronic Sign. Such off-premise advertising shall be allowed and exempt from additional zoning relief, where it is addressed in the executed license agreement.

d. **Public Service Message Requirement.** The owner of a commercial Electronic Sign (except for Marquees) shall be required to devote ten (10%) percent of the Sign's operational time for public service messages (weather, time, temperature, etc.) on a schedule determined and approved by the Authority.

Section 11-6. Conditional Signs.

The following types of Signs are conditional uses, subject to the requirements of Article 6 (Conditional Uses) of this Code, and require Comprehensive Sign Review, as described in Section 11-9 (Comprehensive Sign Review):

a. **Roof Sign.** A Sign mounted to the roof of a Building, or a Sign that extends above the roofline of the building it is attached to.

b. **High Building Sign.** A Sign located at or above the fourth story of a Building.

c. **Marquee.** A Sign projecting from a Building above an entrance that provides overhead protection from the elements, is typically illuminated, and is generally associated with a Theater or other Entertainment use.

Section 11-7. Allowed Signs.

1. **Applicability.** The following types of Signs are allowed for all uses in all zoning districts; except for Residential Uses containing fourteen (14) or fewer dwelling units, where such Signs shall be conditional uses and subject to the requirements of Article 6 (Conditional Uses) of this Code:

    a. **Wall Sign.** A Sign painted or mounted parallel to the exterior wall of a Building.

    b. **Canopy Sign.** A Sign mounted above, below, or to the face of a Canopy (or other overhead structure).

    c. **Projecting Sign.** A Sign attached to and projecting perpendicularly from the exterior wall of a Building, including a blade or banner sign.

    d. **Awning Sign.** A Sign that is printed, sewn, or adhered onto the surface of an awning (including the awning slope, slides, or valence.

    e. **Window Sign.** A Sign posted, placed, or affixed in or on a window, which is intended to be viewed from outside.

    f. **Free-Standing Sign.** A Sign that is directly inserted into the ground and not attached to or supported by any Building.

2. **Requirements for Allowed Signs.** Allowed signs in excess of the requirements of this Article shall be conditional uses, subject to the requirements of Article 6 (Conditional Uses) of this Code.

    a. **Illumination Requirements.** Allowed Signs are subject to the illumination requirements set forth in this Section.

i. Signs may be internally- or externally-illuminated, but only by steady, stationary light sources, directed at the Sign or internal to it.

ii. Only a Sign's content, including alphanumeric characters and logos, may be internally illuminated. Backing panels, sign boxes, and structural elements shall not be internally illuminated.

iii. Illumination shall be installed and maintained such that no direct light or glare shines on any street or nearby property.

iv. Illuminated elements shall be installed with a dimmer.

v. Signs may be illuminated from 5am to 11pm, or until ½ hour after the close of business, whichever is later. Signs associated with businesses that are open 24 hours, or Signs for addresses or identifying residential buildings, may be illuminated continuously. Any Sign that is illuminated after 11pm, and which faces or is located within a residential, conservation protection, or open space district or subdistrict, must be dimmed to a maximum luminance of 150 cd/m2 from 11pm to 5am.

b. **Dimensional Requirements.** Allowed Signs are subject to the dimensional requirements set forth in Tables 11.A through 11.G. Such requirements, as well as special exceptions to them, may be further defined in Section 11-8 (Measurement Standards) and Section 11-10 (Maintenance and Nonconforming Signs).

Table 11.A - Dimensional Requirements for Allowed Signs

Sign Type	Maximum Number of Signs Allowed	Maximum Sign Area per Individual Sign	Maximum Cumulative Sign Area per Sign Type	Maximum Cumulative Sign Area for All Signs	Additional Requirements
Wall Sign	No maximum	3.5 square feet per 1 foot of Sign Frontage	3.5 square feet per 1 foot of Sign Frontage	4.5 square feet per 1 foot of Sign Frontage	Table 11.B - Wall Signs
Canopy Sign	No maximum	3.5 square feet per 1 foot of Sign Frontage	3.5 square feet per 1 foot of Sign Frontage		Table 11.C - Canopy Signs
Projecting Sign	No maximum	25 square feet	1 square foot per 1 foot of Sign Frontage		Table 11.D - Projecting Signs
Awning Sign	No maximum	50% of the awning area per	50% of the awning area per		Table 11.E - Awnings Signs

		Awning	Awning		
Window Sign	No maximum	1/3 of the total combined window area per Story	1/3 of the total combined window area per Story	Excluded from combined Sign Area calculation	Table 11.F - Window Signs
Free-Standing Sign	1 per Lot Frontage	32 square feet	32 square feet per Lot Frontage		Table 11.G - Free-Standing Signs

Table 11.B - Wall Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

Sign Height (Max)	A	4.5 feet
Placement Height (Max)	B	25 feet
Projection from Facade (Max)	C	1 foot

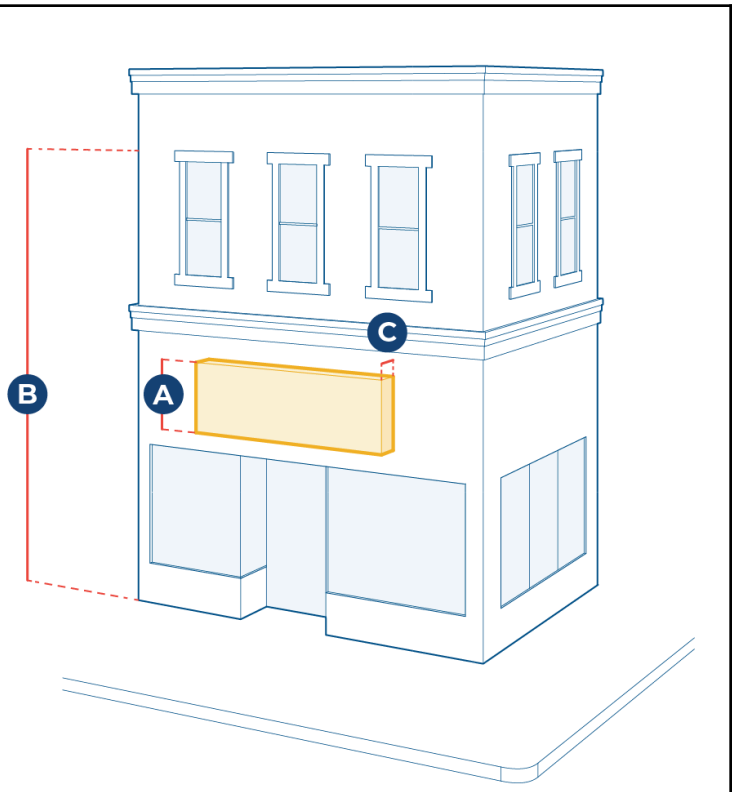


Table 11.C - Canopy Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

Sign Height (Max)	A	4.5 feet
Placement Height (Max)	B	25 feet
Clearance Height (Min)	C	8 feet **Signs subject to Public Improvement Commission (PIC) review shall have a minimum clearance height of 10 feet, or other height as set through that review process*
Projection from Canopy (Max)	D	Mounted to canopy face: 1 foot
	E	Mounted above or below canopy: Shall not project beyond the edges of the Canopy

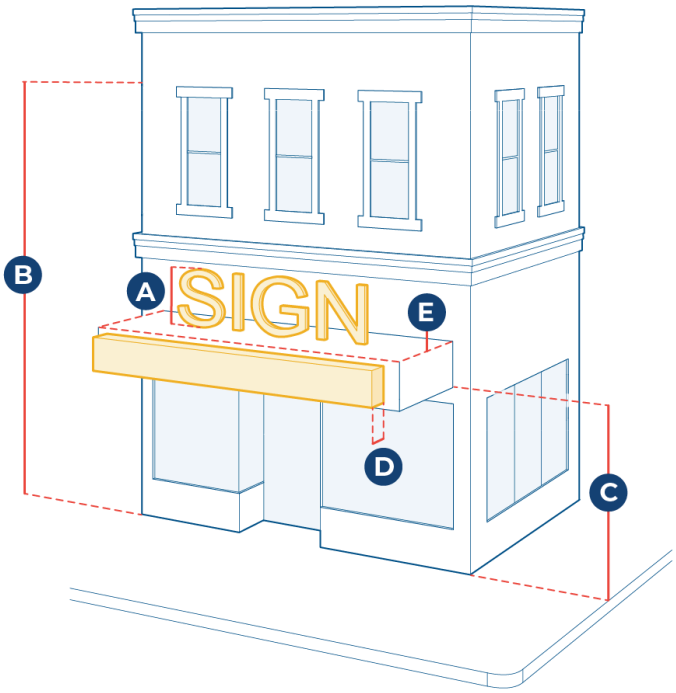


Table 11.D - Projecting Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

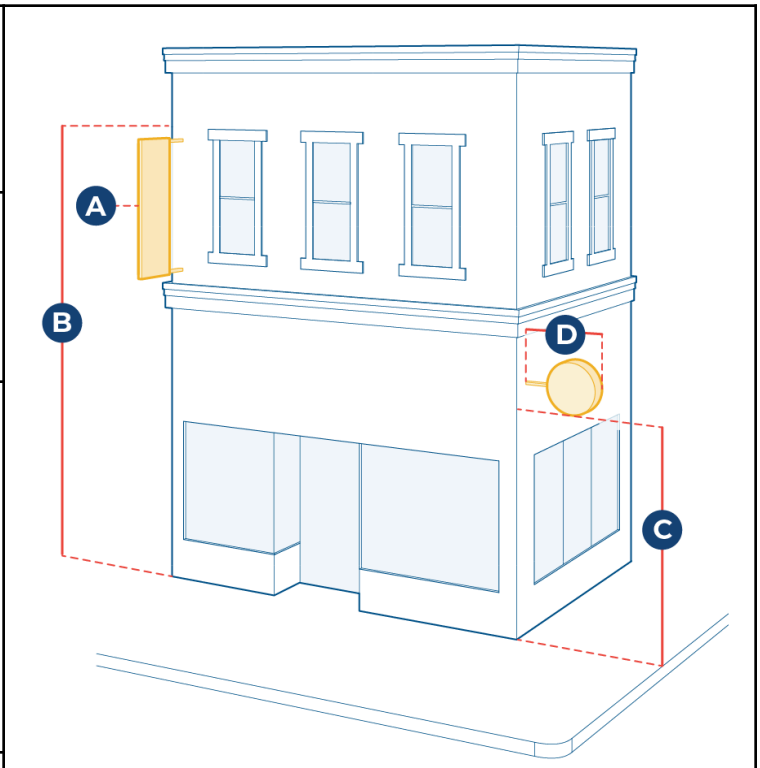
Sign Area per Individual Sign (Max)	A	25 square feet	
Placement Height (Max)	B	25 feet	
Clearance Height (Min)	C	8 feet **Signs subject to Public Improvement Commission (PIC) review shall have a minimum clearance height of 10 feet, or other height as set through that review process*	
Projection from Facade (Max)	D	6 feet or 2/3 of the sidewalk width; whichever is less	

Table 11.E - Awning Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

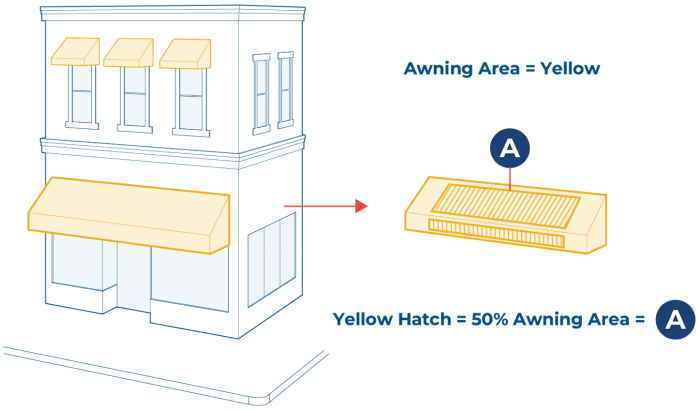
Allowed Sign Locations		Any portion of Basement, first, or second-story Awnings	
Sign Area per Awning (Max)	A	50% of the awning area per Awning	

Table 11.F - Window Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

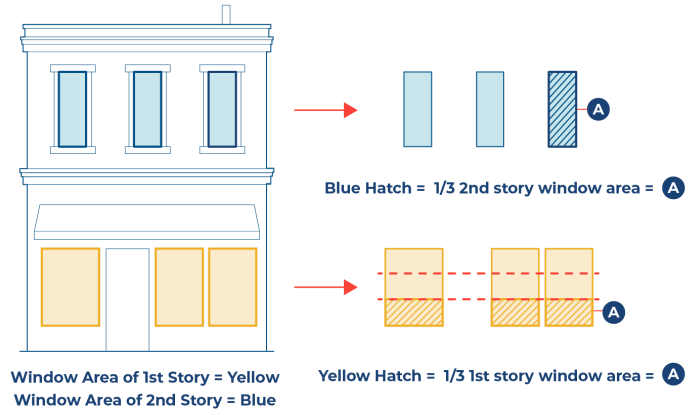
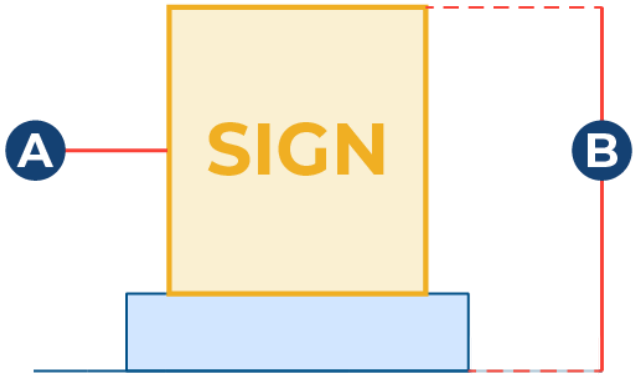
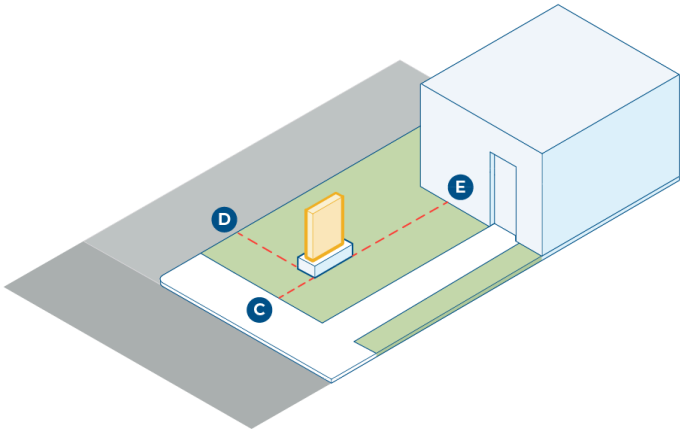
Allowed Sign Locations		Any portion of Basement, first, or second-story windows	
Cumulative Sign Area for Window Signs (Max)	A	1/3 of the total combined window area per story **Such Sign Area may not be transferred across different Stories*	

Table 11.G - Free-Standing Sign Requirements *(See also Table 11.A)*

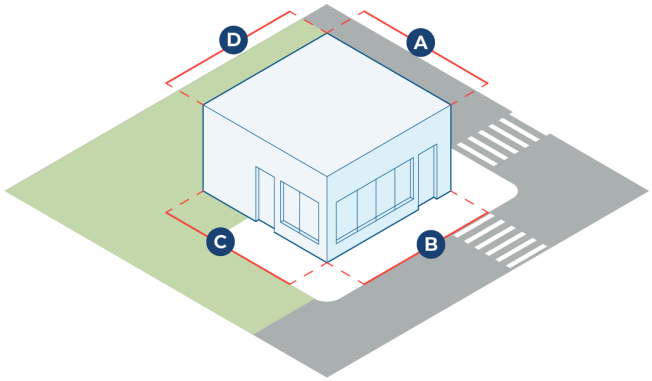
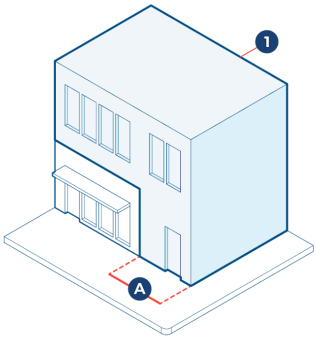
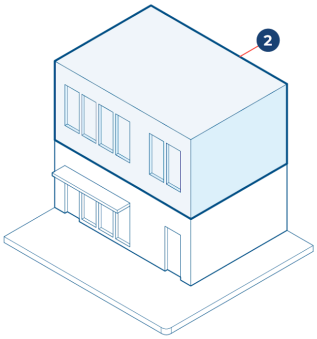
Allowed Sign Locations		Front Yard(s)	
Sign Area per Individual Sign (Max)	A	32 square feet	
Sign Height (Max)	B	6 feet	
Setbacks (Min)	C	From Property Line(s): 3 feet **No portion of the Sign may encroach into the public right of way*	
	D	From Driveway / Drive Aisle: 5 feet **No portion of the Sign may encroach into the accessible path of travel*	
	E	From Nearest Building: 10 feet	

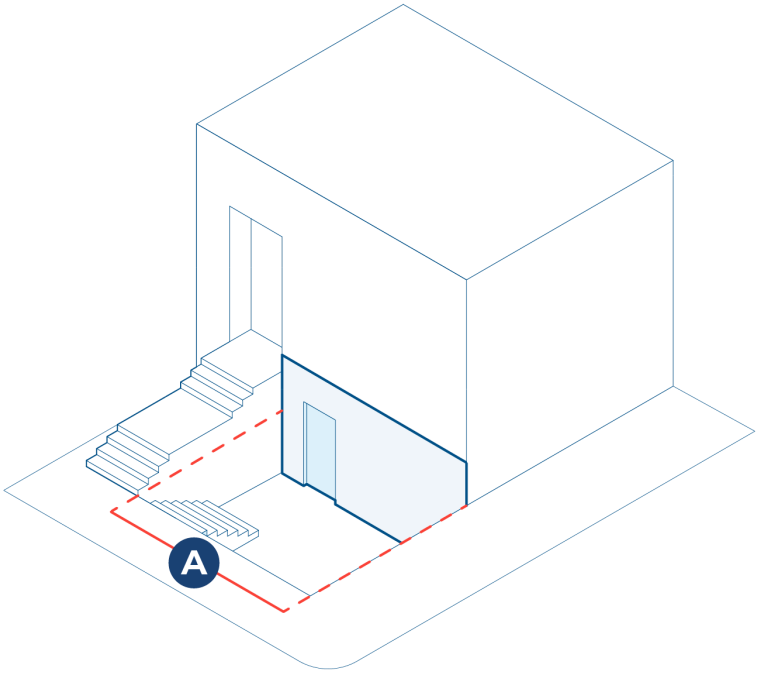
Section 11-8. Measurement Standards.

Measurement standards for Sign-related dimensional requirements are set forth in Tables 11.I through 11.L of this Section.

Table 11.I - Sign Frontage Standards

a. Determining Sign Frontage(s).

Sign Frontage shall be the length of the building face(s) that an establishment exclusively occupies, measured as the sum of each side of the Building that has an entrance for patrons or which faces a Street.	 **A & B have street facing fronts, C has an entry, D has neither** **Sign Frontage = A + B + C**
b. Establishments Occupying the Second-Story or Above.	
An establishment occupying the second-story of a Building shall only have a Sign Frontage if it has an exclusive entrance, accessible from the Street. For such establishments, the Sign Frontage shall be measured at the ground-story, including only the portion of the ground-story that the establishment occupies. **As per Table 11.F (Windows Sign Requirements), Window Signs may be placed upon the windows of a second story occupied by an establishment, regardless of whether it has a Sign Frontage.*	 **Business 1 has a dedicated ground floor entrance, therefore: Sign Frontage = A**  **Business 2 has no dedicated ground floor entrance, therefore: Sign Frontage = NONE**
c. Establishments Occupying the Basement-Story.	

An establishment occupying the Basement-story of a Building shall only have a Sign Frontage if it has an exclusive entrance accessible from the Street. For such establishments, the Sign Frontage shall be measured at the story where the exclusive entrance is located, including only the length of the frontage associated with that entrance. **As per Table 11.F (Windows Sign Requirements), Window Signs may be placed upon the windows of a Basement story occupied by an establishment, regardless of whether it has a Sign Frontage.*	 **Sign Frontage = A**
d. Establishments Occupying both the Ground- and Basement-Stories.	

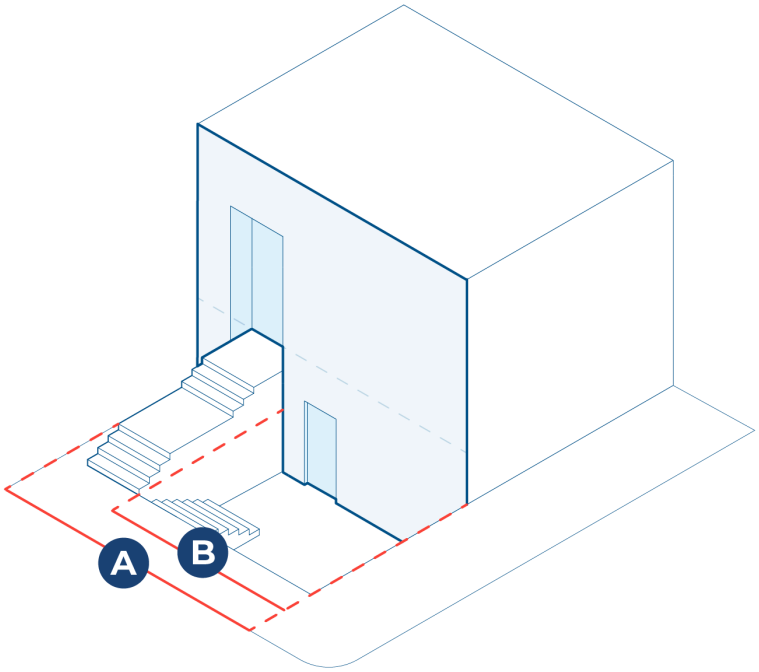
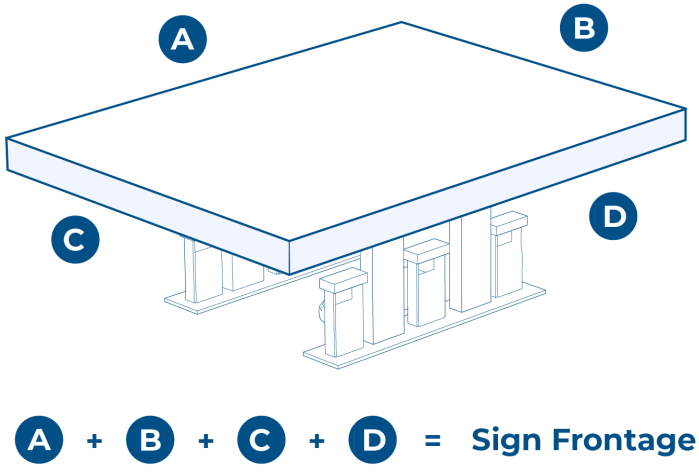
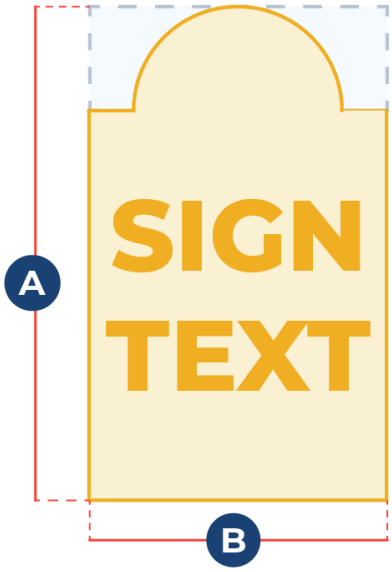
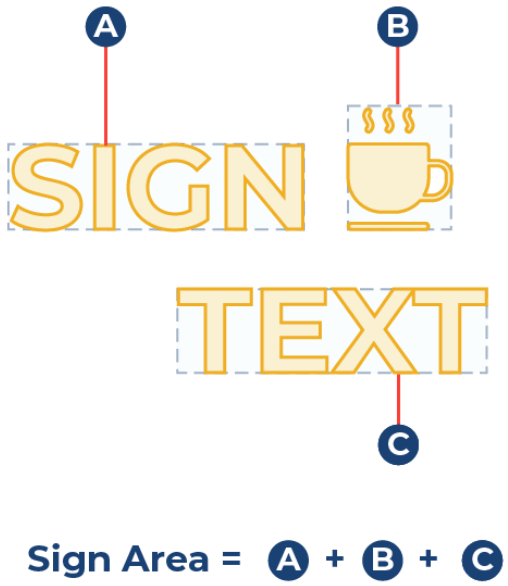
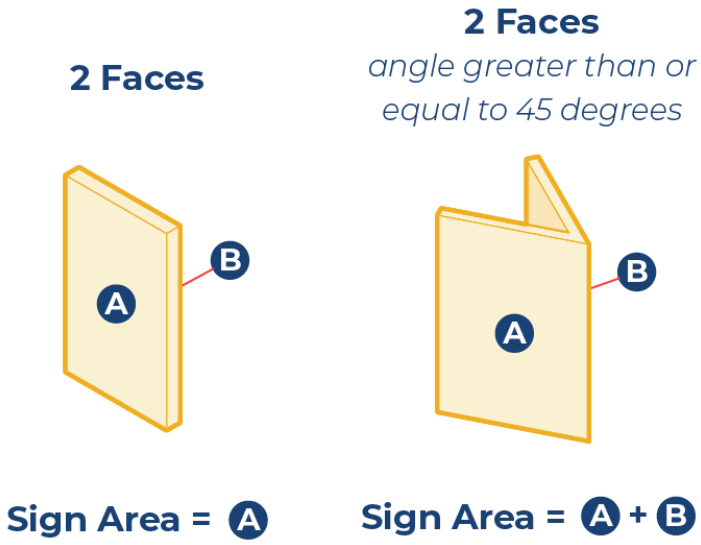
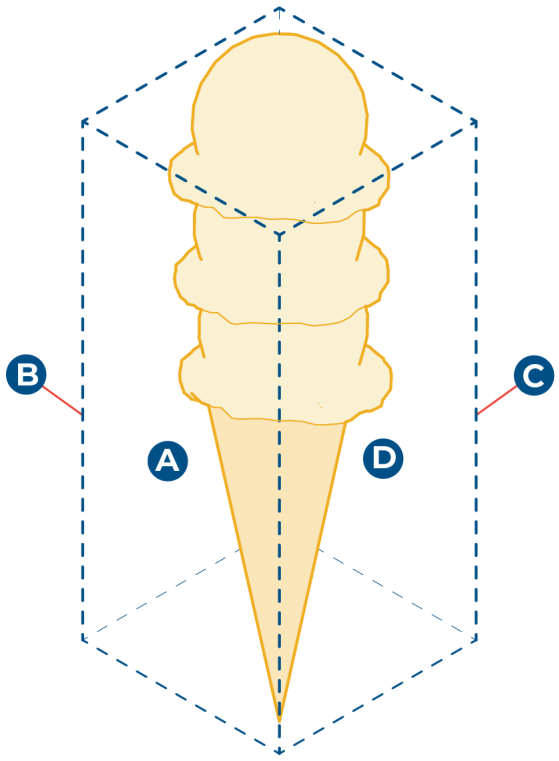
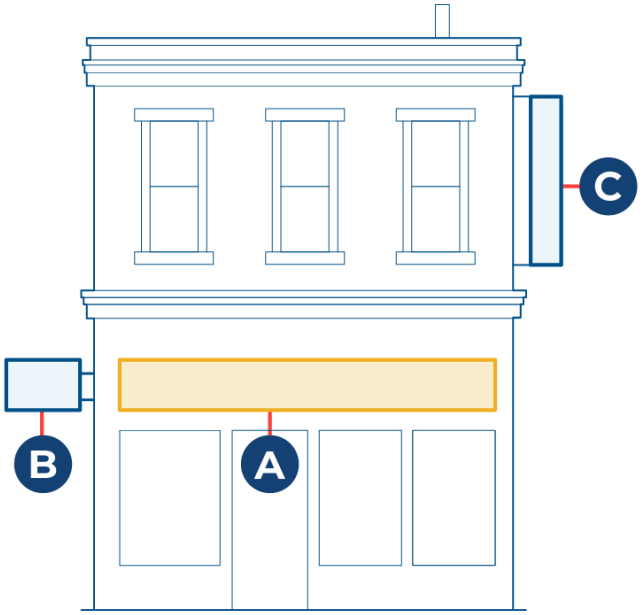
For establishments occupying both the ground- and Basement-stories, the Sign Frontage shall be measured along either the ground-story or Basement-story; whichever length is greater.	
e. Free-Standing Canopies.	
For free-standing Canopies (such as a gas station canopy), the Sign Frontage shall be measured as the length of each side of the Canopy.	

Table 11.J - Sign Area Standards

a. Signs on Background Panel.	
For Signs mounted on, affixed to, or manufactured as part of a background panel or other surface distinctively constructed as a background for a Sign's content, the Sign Area is measured as the area of the smallest rectangle that encloses both the Sign's content and background.	 Sign Area = A x B  Sign Area = A x B
b. Letters and Logos as Individual Sign Elements.	

For Signs mounted as individual letters or logos without a background panel or other surface distinctively constructed as background for a Sign's content, the Sign Area is measured as a sum of the area of the smallest rectangle(s) that will enclose each word and graphic of the Sign. **The Sign Area of Awning Signs shall be calculated using this method.*	
c. Signs with Two Faces.	
For Signs with two Sign Faces, if the interior angle between the two sign faces is 45 degrees or less, the Sign Area is measured as the area of one Sign Face only. If the angle between the two Sign Faces is greater than 45 degrees, the sign area is measured as the sum of the areas of the two Sign Faces.	
d. Free-Form, Multi-Face, or Sculptural Signs.	

For free-form, multi-face, or sculptural signs, the Sign Area is measured as 50% of the sum of the areas of the four vertical Sign Faces of the smallest rectangular prism that will enclose the Sign.	 **Sign Area = (A + B + C + D) ÷ 2**
e. Total Sign Area (Sign Type).	

The total Sign Area of each sign type is measured as the sum of the areas of each of an establishment's Signs of the same type (ex. Wall Signs or Projecting Signs). **Ghost Signs and Historic Signs, as described in Section 11-10.2 (Nonconforming Signs), shall be exempted from this calculation.*	 **Total Sign Area (Projecting Signs) = B + C** **Total Sign Area (Wall Sign) = A**
f. Total Sign Area (Combined).	

The total combined Sign Area for an establishment is measured as the sum of the areas of all of its applicable Signs. **Table 11.A (Dimensional Requirements for Allowed Signs) establishes which allowed sign types are included and excluded from this calculation.* ***Ghost Signs and Historic Signs, as described in Section 11-10.2 (Nonconforming Signs), shall be exempted from this calculation.*	

Table 11.K - Sign Height Standards

a. Building-Mounted Signs.

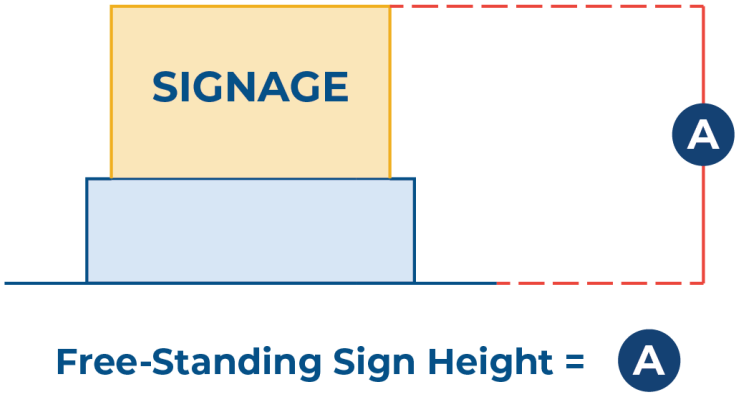
For building-mounted signs, Sign Height is measured as the vertical distance between the lowest part and the highest part of the same Sign, excluding any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted to or hanging from.	
b. Free-Standing Signs.	
For Free-Standing Signs, Sign Height is measured as the vertical distance between the highest part of the Sign and the ground below it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted to.	

Table 11.M - Placement Height Standards

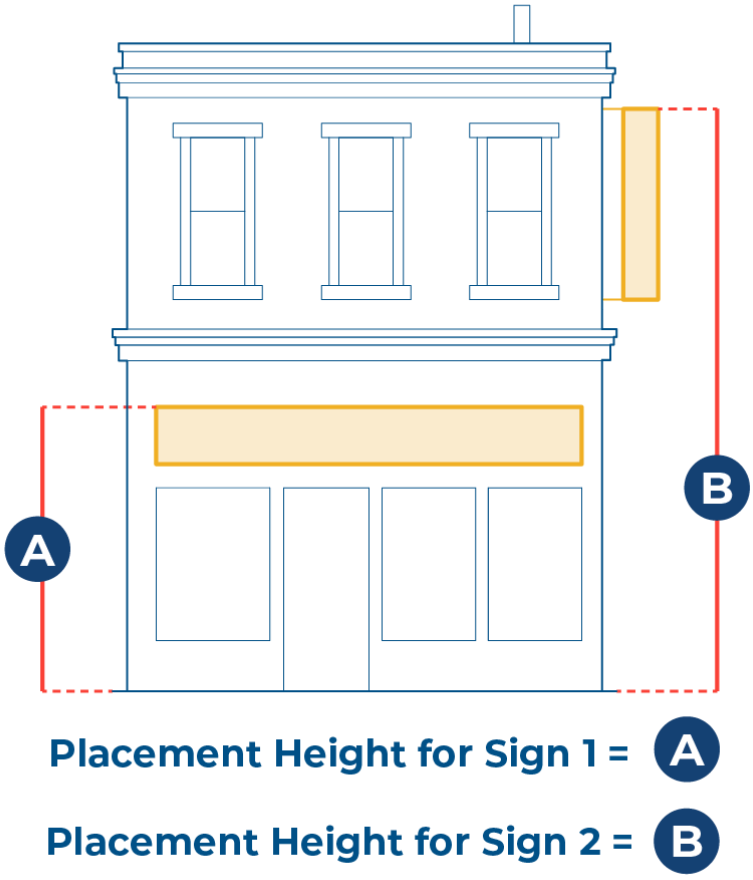
a. General Rule.	
Placement Height is measured as the vertical distance between the highest part of a Sign and the ground below it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted or hanging from.	

Table 11.N - Clearance Height Standards

a. General Rule.

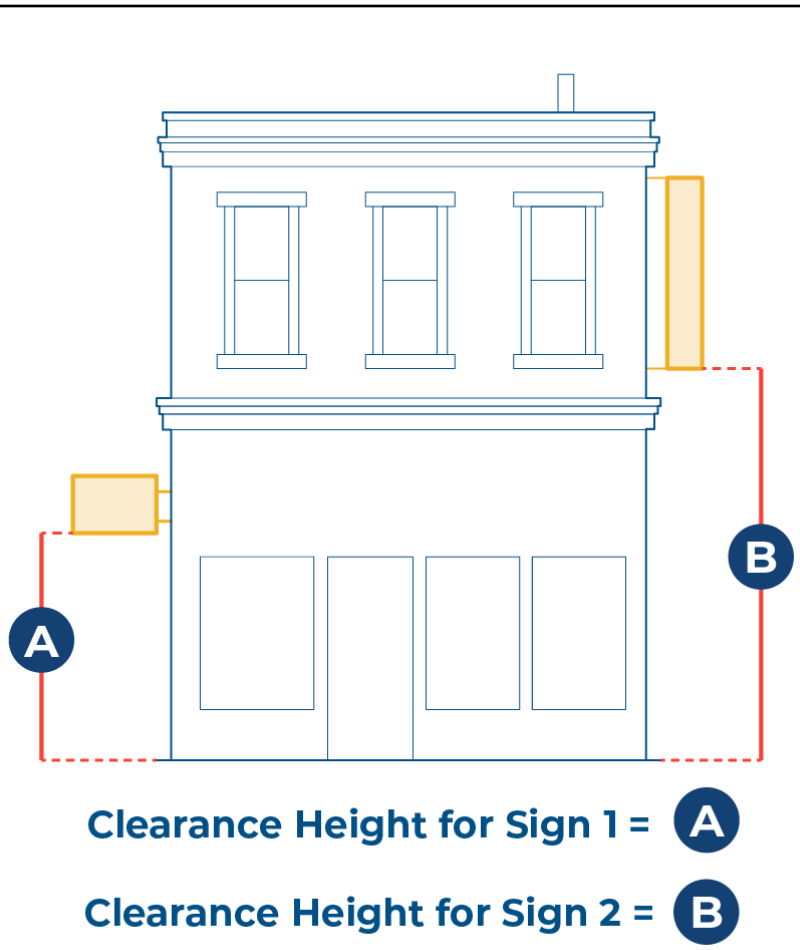
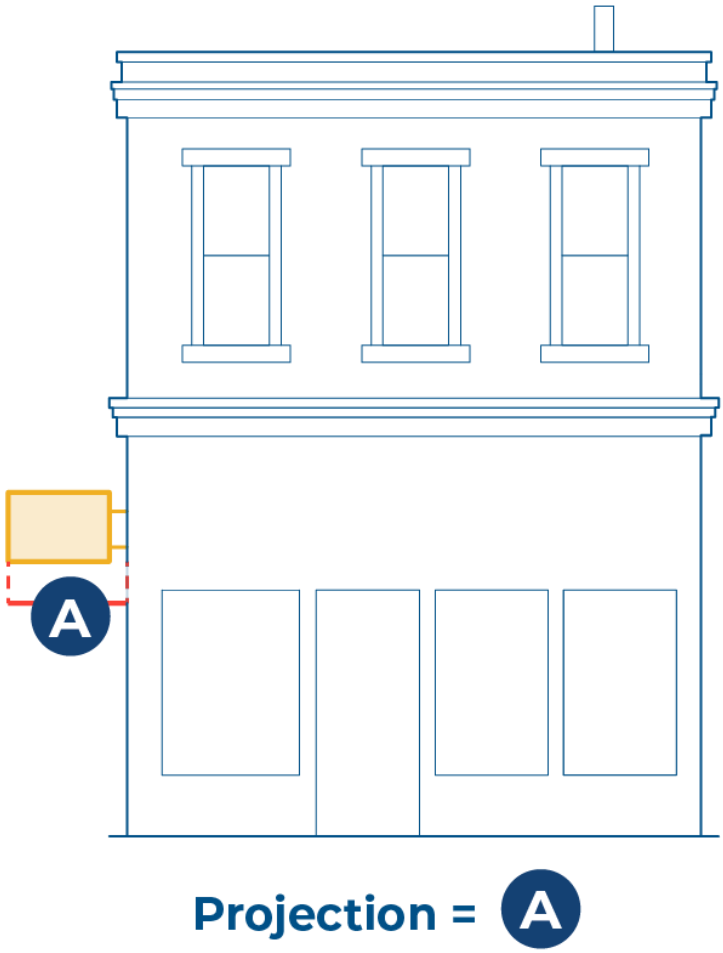
Clearance Height is measured as the vertical distance between the lowest part of a Sign and the ground immediately below it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted or hanging from.	

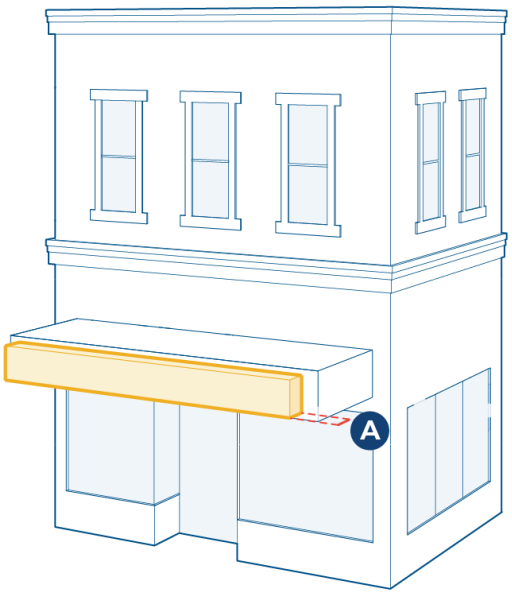
Table 11.L - Projection Standards

a. Building-Mounted Signs.

For building-mounted signs, Projection is measured as the horizontal distance between the exterior wall of the Building to which the Sign is affixed and the point of the Sign farthest from it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted or hanging from.



b. Canopy-Mounted Signs.

For Signs mounted to the face of a Canopy, Projection is measured as the horizontal distance between the canopy face and the point of the Sign farthest from it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted or hanging from.	 **Projection = A**

For Signs mounted above or below a Canopy, Projection is measured as the horizontal distance between the edge(s) of the Canopy and the point of the Sign farthest from it, including any structural elements to which the Sign is mounted or hanging from.	

Section 11-9. Comprehensive Sign Review.

1. **Purpose.** The purpose of Comprehensive Sign Review is to ensure appropriate design outcomes for Signs with significant visual and physical impacts on the Sign's surrounding urban context and public realm; to promote a harmonious synthesis of Signs and architectural features; and to allow for unique and creative signage not contemplated by this Article.

2. **Applicability.** The Planning Department shall conduct Comprehensive Sign Review for the sign types described below:

    a. Electronic Signs, as specified in Section 11-5.7 (Electronic Signs);

    b. Conditional Signs, as specified in Section 11-6 (Conditional Signs); and

    c. Signs subject to removal that elected to comply with the requirements of this Section 11-9, as specified in Section 11-11.1 (Removal).

3. **Standards for Certification.** The Planning Department shall certify the design of a Sign, if:

a. The design produces signage in alignment with any design guidelines produced by the Planning Department; and

b. The location and size of the Sign do not compromise public safety.

4. **Process and Requirements.**

a. **Application.** For any Sign subject to or electing to comply with Comprehensive Sign Review, the Inspectional Services Department, in accordance with Section 11-4 (Permitting), shall direct the Applicant to submit documentation of the proposed Sign (including dimensions, location, materials, and other design elements or technical specifications) to the Planning Department.

b. **Additional Information.** If the provided documentation of the proposed Sign does not contain adequate information for the Planning Department to conduct their review, the Planning Department shall request that the Applicant submit any additional information that may be needed.

c. **Review Timeline.** The length of Comprehensive Sign Review for a complete application should be no longer than thirty (30) days, except for High-Building Signs and Electronic Signs.

d. **Review Process.** During Comprehensive Sign Review, the Planning Department shall review the design of the Sign for consistency with the standards specified in Section 11-9.3 (Standards for Certification). In this review process, the Planning Department may request changes to the size, placement, and technical specifications (such as illumination or mounting) of the Sign, so as to bring it into greater alignment with the standards for certification stated in this Section. In no instances shall these requests contradict the provisions of Section 11-1 (Purpose and Applicability).

e. **Certification.** If deemed consistent with the standards specified in Section 11-9.3 (Standards for Certification), the Planning Department may certify the design of any proposed Sign. This determination may be made at any point during the Comprehensive Sign Review process. Thereafter, the Applicant shall be required to obtain any needed zoning relief, as specified in this Article.

i. **Denial.** If deemed inconsistent with the standards specified in Section 11-9.3 (Standards for Certification), the Planning Department may withhold certification of the design of any proposed Sign. This determination may be made at any point during the Comprehensive Sign Review process. Thereafter, the Applicant shall be required to obtain any needed zoning relief, as specified in this Article.

Section 11-10. Maintenance and Nonconforming Signs.

1. **Maintenance.** The maintenance and repair of a Sign shall not require a sign permit, provided that such maintenance does not alter the size, illumination method, or location of an existing Sign or the sign structure to which it is affixed. Maintenance exempt from a sign permit may include, but is not limited to:

    a. Painting or Repainting;

    b. Cleaning;

    c. Changing items of information;

    d. Safety-related repairs;

    e. In-kind replacement of illuminated elements; and

    f. Replacement of interchangeable sign elements, such as banners, sign panels, and awning coverings.

2. **Nonconforming Signs.**

    a. The provisions of Section 9-1 (Extension of Nonconforming Uses and Extension and Reconstruction of Nonconforming Buildings) shall not apply to Signs.

    b. No Sign shall be enlarged or structurally altered, except when such changes are in accordance with this Article, or when they would bring a nonconforming Sign into conformance with this Article.

    c. Any Sign which is lawfully existing or predates this Article, that does not conform to the requirements of this Article, may be repaired, maintained, or otherwise altered in accordance with Section 11-10.1 (Maintenance), including the following, which shall not be included in the calculation of Sign Area:

        i. **Ghost Signs.** Signs painted on an exterior wall of a Building at least fifty (50) years prior to the date of the permit application, which may have faded due to natural weathering.

        ii. **Historic Signs.** Signs with an official landmark designation or on buildings with an official landmark designation from the Boston Landmarks Commission.

Section 11-11. Removal.

1. The sign(s) of a previous or defunct establishment must be removed within thirty (30) days after a sign permit application for a new establishment has been submitted. An existing sign

from a previous or defunct establishment, including Ghost Signs and Historic Signs, may be retained without the need for zoning relief if certified through Comprehensive Sign Review, subject to Section 11-9 (Comprehensive Sign Review).

2. Any Sign not specified in Section 11-3 (Signs and Non-Sign Items Exempt From a Sign Permit) that is erected without a sign permit is illegal and subject to immediate removal.

DEFINITIONS (TO BE LOCATED IN ARTICLE 2)

- **Awning.** A wall-mounted frame covered with fabric or other flexible material that projects from the face of a Building and is intended to provide shade and weather protection.
- **Canopy.** A wall-mounted structure that projects from the face of a Building and is intended to provide shade and weather protection.
- **Comprehensive Sign Review.** The review as described in Section 11-9 of this Code.
- **Sign.** Any text, logo, graphic representation, or supporting structure, that is used for wayfinding or advertising, and is intended to be viewed from outside.